

John 13:1-38

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Date: 05 May 2024

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[0 : 00] A few years ago, Daniel Craig, who you'll probably know as James Bond, he was in Macbeth on Broadway.

! And I saw a clip online of him coming out the stage door to greet the crowd at the end of the show. There was a crowd that had gathered by the stage door hoping to get a glimpse.

And he came out and he said, thank you, thank you, thank you. And he waved to people and he touched his chest and gave that kind of earnest look, you know, as if to say, I'm so grateful that you're here.

That was one thing. But as he was doing this, as he was going around and waving, I noticed behind him there was a little crowd of people that were being ushered in the stage door. And when Daniel had finished what he was doing, he followed them.

They had what every theater goer wants. They had backstage passes. They had access to a more intimate setting. They were able to see and hear from the Great One up close and personal.

[1 : 11] And that's what's going on as we turn to these chapters in John's Gospel. Jesus' public ministry has come to an end at the end of chapter 12. And as he withdraws, he brings a special group with him for a private meeting.

His disciples, verse 1, his own. They are given backstage passes. And it is the most intimate and personal gathering where Jesus will explain both what his ministry up to this point has meant, as well as the significance of everything that lies ahead.

His hour has come. 13, verse 1. He told us back in 12.23, if you turn back the page, he told us in 12.23 that this has happened.

The moment has come. And we've been waiting for this moment all the way back from chapter 2 when he told his mother that his hour had not yet come. The hour is the hour of his death and resurrection and return to his Father in heaven.

It is the hour that lies at the epicenter of human history. And it has arrived. It's here. It's Thursday evening.

[2 : 23] It's the last 24 hours of Jesus' earthly life. These chapters are the last words that he will say to his disciples before his death. These are monumental chapters of biblical text.

We aren't just backstage. We're on holy ground. And here at the start of chapter 13, we are being oriented to all that lies ahead.

Let's drill in for a moment to verse 1. Look at verse 1. So when is this happening? Before the Feast of Passover. Which feast? The Feast of Passover.

When the Passover lambs were killed and God's people celebrated how God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. It was the event that defined them as a people. And they celebrated this every year with great joy and really significant reverence.

What does Jesus know? He knows that his hour has come. What does this hour entail? He will, he tells us, depart from the world and return to the Father.

[3 : 23] His departure is his death. And his return to the Father is everything that will follow that. His glorification. That thing to which he has alluded all the way throughout the gospel up to this point.

What motivates all of this? Verse 1. Having loved his own who were in the world. Who does he love? His own. His disciples. Those whom he had chosen. What did he do? He loved them to the end.

All that follows is the outworking of the love of Christ for his people. 12.23. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

The Son of Man. Jesus' title of choice to describe himself in the gospels. But he is that exalted figure with all power and authority from the book of Daniel.

He's taking the title from there. And we're told that the Son of Man is now ready to be glorified. Well, of course he should be glorified. It is fitting for someone so great to receive glory and honor.

[4 : 22] He is the cosmic king of all the earth. 12.31. Now is also the judgment of the world. 32. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

It's time for the Son of Man, the Great One, to be glorified. It's also the time for the judgment of the world. Jesus says, When I am lifted up, the language of exaltation and glorification, when I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself.

He said this, verse 33, chapter 12.33, He said this to show by what kind of death He was going to die. What is all this glorification and all this majesty and all this great one and death doing in the same sentence?

The exalted King will be glorified. He will be lifted high. But He'll be on a cross to die. This is the hour.

This is what it means for Him to love His people to the end. The cross of Good Friday is the blazing center of the love of God for His people.

[5 : 31] But this is such an astonishing paradox. How can the King of Glory die a criminal's death? It's such an astonishing paradox that Jesus begins His last 24 hours by taking His disciples through what this will mean.

Taking His disciples to this point. This is the focus of this backstage gathering. The significance of the cross that He will hang on tomorrow afternoon. And He starts with foot washing.

What has foot washing got to do with the cross? Well, these events I want to say four things about what's going on in chapter 13 as it relates to the cross.

The foot washing, first of all, point number one, enacts its effect. It enacts its effect. Verses 2-5.

Now, if you've been in the church for any length.

You're familiar with this story. But we may miss the fact that the reason this happens is because of a problem. In this culture, when you went to eat at someone's house, it was custom for the host to provide water and usually a servant to clean your feet.

[7 : 05] Tarmac and pavements weren't yet a thing. So roads were dirty and footwear was minimal. Plus, the seating arrangements at table when you came to eat were different from the ones that we typically use today.

You didn't sit on a seat with your feet on the floor. You reclined on your elbow with your feet extended out and sort of followed around the table like that.

Which meant that your feet were beside the head of the next person. Hence the need for the washing. And on this occasion, no one has done this.

Which is strange. That would have been the custom. It would have been very normal. And it's especially strange given who they are with. The Lord, 12-49, has told us, He is the Lord who has come from the Father.

Now, we're not told why this oversight has happened, but Luke tells us in chapter 22 of his gospel that it was because the disciples were arguing over who was the greatest.

[8 : 11] The disciples prepared the Passover, but they didn't provide cleaning. They didn't mind hosting a meal, which was an expression of worship and a reason for joy and for reverence, but they were way too important to do the task of a servant.

They were arguing about who was the greatest. And if that is your metric, you're never going to stoop to serve. Not the Lord Jesus. He rises. In our day, it would be he takes off his jacket and he puts on the servant's apron.

He gets the water. He washes the disciples' feet. This is remarkable humility. The King of glory stoops to serve.

Even, even washing the feet of the one who will betray him. Isn't that interesting? The only disciple who creates a fuss is Peter.

The others, they were very happy to be served by the Lord Jesus. And Judas, Judas knew what he was about to do. He was happy to have Jesus serve him.

[9 : 28] And Jesus, who knew what was coming, still washed Judas' feet. Do you think Judas made eye contact? Do you think he was too ashamed?

Do you think Jesus held his gaze and stared at him knowing what he was about to do? I don't know.

It's not important. We're not told. But Jesus loved his disciples to the end. Astonishing humility. But remember, this is about the cross.

It's not just about the foot washing. And it's not just about the cross insofar as Jesus humbles himself, but in the way that the washing pictures what the greater act of service will achieve. Cleansing. Not of dirt from feet, but cleansing from sin. In the Old Testament, sin is often depicted as uncleanness or impurity.

[10:28] And the offering of sacrifices was said to bring cleansing. Sin is atoned for and the sinner is cleansed. This is what the cross achieves for the believer. The removal of our uncleanness and our impurity.

The blood of Christ washes all of our sins away. Look at verse 10. Those words of Peter, they are delightful. Verse 10, you, those words to Peter rather, you are clean.

That's the offer of the cross of Jesus Christ. The removal of the stains that sin leaves in our lives. Cleansing from every foul thing we have ever said or ever done or that has ever been said or done to us.

Every single one of them. Who among us is not ashamed of things in our past? If we could only go back and delete that bit of the film, cut that scene out and get rid of it altogether.

Well, the cross deals with it. The cross deals with it all. I found myself yesterday at the back of our garden. I went to brush something up and realized there was a load of dirt in the gutter on my study.

[11:49] And so I climbed up and went along and pulled all this. And it was just lots and lots and lots of filthy gunk. And my hands were completely covered. And I go back inside. And just washing all of that dirt off feels great.

It feels great to get clean. To be clean on the inside feels even better. And I want to say if you're not a Christian, that is what Jesus holds out to you this morning.

That is the offer of the cross of Christ. Put your faith in Him and the effect of the cross will be applied to your life. Cleansing for every sin. If you're not a Christian, that's the offer.

But if, like me, you're a Christian, you need to be reminded of this reality. I need this reminder all the time. In Christ, whatever your past, whatever this past week, verse 10, look at verse 10, you are completely clean.

When you're ashamed of things in your past, and Satan comes and he tries to accuse you, tries to tell you that you couldn't possibly be a Christian because of these things that you did, or these things that you said, and that sense of shame comes over you, remember those words.

[13:06] You are completely clean. When that thought comes to your head, remind yourself of that and smile.

So first of all, Jesus enacts the cross's effect. Then secondly, he expresses its necessity. He expresses its necessity. That's verses 6 to 8. Look at the exchange with Peter.

He came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, you do not wash my feet. Jesus answered him, What I'm doing you do not understand now, clearly. But afterward, you will understand.

Peter's still not getting it. You will never wash my feet. Jesus answered him. If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.

There's a sense in which Peter's reaction initially is understandable. It's completely wrong that Jesus, the King of Glory, would do such a menial task, and that Peter would be served in this way by the King of Glory.

[14:06] You wash my feet? No. Jesus says Peter doesn't understand, verse 7, and that's clear by his persistence in verse 8.

No, no, no, never. Never. This isn't going to happen. You're the one, Jesus, who's got it wrong. But Jesus cuts through all of the Peter-like bluster and says if he doesn't, then Peter has no relationship with him.

If I do not wash you, you have no share with me. If you don't allow Jesus to cleanse you, you can have no part in him. This is the key.

It's not just about foot washing. It's about what it depicts. And if you don't allow the King of Glory to serve you in this way, you miss out completely. And lots of us, lots of people, don't allow him to serve them.

It's the problem of grace. We find it too offensive. Grace, you see, receiving something as a gift, it requires us to admit our need of cleansing, which is humbling.

[15:11] It requires us to admit that we can do nothing ourselves to fix the problem, which is doubly humbling. So we need it, and we can't sort it out. Doubly humbling.

And it requires us to admit that it took the death of the Son of God to cleanse us. Which is just almost, well, it's too humbling for some people, and so they refuse to go there.

Don't let your ego get in the way of your need for salvation. Don't let your ego get in the way of your need for salvation and the grace that Christ gives. Peter then gets it.

Verse 9. Jesus says, If I don't wash you, you can't have any part of me. He goes, Right, well, wash all of me then. Every single bit. From the tip of my top of my hair all the way to the bottom of my feet.

All of me. And that's the natural response. When the penny drops and you push your ego aside. We know, don't we, I need more than my dirty feet to be cleansed. Every part of me needs to be transformed.

[16:15] And Jesus says to him, He says to Peter, That's what happens when you come to Christ. You are already clean. You're already clean because of the atoning work of the cross that is about to happen the next day.

The point is the necessity of the cross of Christ. We have to be cleansed by Jesus in order to belong to him. And we cannot serve Christ until we have first been served by him.

I hope you know, don't you, that apart from the cross of Christ, there is no Christian faith. It's such an offense to people. And there are people in the church who want to just kind of sideline the cross completely because it's such an offense.

Apart from the cross, there is no Christian faith. Apart from Christ's cleansing, there is no Christian life. Apart from repentance, we cannot be cleansed and we have no share with Jesus.

The cross is the only way to life with Jesus. There is no other way. We're going to hear that, Lord willing, in chapter 14. There is a growing amount at the moment of cultural interest in Christianity.

[17:27] Lots of high-profile figures are saying positive things about religion and spirituality and God, and some are even saying positive things about Jesus. The author, Tom Holland, writes about and speaks about the influence of Christianity on civilization.

Louise Perry and others are discussing the ethical and the moral effect that rejecting Christianity has had and speaking positively about a return in that direction. Old Russell Brand seems to be on his own journey.

He, I think, I believe he got baptized according to his own system this week in the Thames. You've got to be keen in order to get in there with all the E. coli.

Now, I'm grateful for all of this. I think it's a really good thing for us that these people are talking in this way. I'm grateful for these conversations. But the truth is that unless someone is washed by the Lord Jesus by putting their faith in Him, by surrendering their lives completely body and soul to Him, they have no part in Him.

They remain interested observers. The cross is absolutely necessary. And also, just to say, do you see, it's also sufficient.

[18:36] Once you come to Jesus for washing, verse 10, you don't start over again every time you sin. I put that in in the fill in the blanks. Gold diggers. Those of you that are doing gold diggers, boys and girls, that's the thing.

Listen, once you come to Jesus for washing, you don't start over again every time you sin. That's question 10, gold diggers. Once you have been cleansed, you remain clean.

You just need to wash off the dirt that you pick up as you go along. It's confessing our daily sins, not coming to Christ every time we sin again. Once you have had a bath, coming to Christ by faith, it's a once-in-a-lifetime thing.

Once you've had a bath, you just need to get your feet washed. Regular confession. When Jesus finishes washing the disciples' feet, He returns to the table, checks that they've understood what He has done and what it means for them.

The absolute necessity of the cross. But then He also explains, point number three, He explains its example. He explains its example.

[19:45] 12 to 14. When He had washed their feet, put on His outer garments, and resumed His place, He said to them, Do you understand what I have done to you? You call Me teacher and Lord, and you're right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent Him.

Jesus' posture, in this exchange, is an example for believers to follow. It's not that we are literally to wash one another's feet.

It's not that we need buckets and sponges at the door, but that the pattern of the cross is supposed to play out in the lives of Christ's followers. We are supposed to see ourselves as servants.

Jesus draws a big, straight line between servant and master, such that if you call Him Lord and teacher, and as Lord and teacher, He is prepared to humble Himself to the lowest point, then it would be absurd to suggest that it is beneath us to do the same.

[20 : 59] This group were arguing about who was the greatest. Who had the most credible reason to be served rather than to serve. We have our own ways of avoiding service.

There's lots of reasons that we might present. You don't need to serve the poor. We have a welfare state. We can't fix everyone's problems, so, well, we shouldn't try and fix anyone's problems.

I think the big one for all of us is, I would do that, but I'm too busy. There are people around you whom you could serve.

People with needs that you come across in your ordinary life and by belonging to the church. Our Master stooped a greater distance to serve us. He did it in a far more radical way than we ever would for another person, and we are not above Him.

And let me also say this. As a relatively new member of this church, it has been a particular encouragement to see how Christ's example of service is followed here.

[22 : 03] I say to you, if you feel challenged by Christ's words here and you think, I need to be more servant-hearted, but I don't know where to start, look around in this church community and you'll see lots of people doing lots of servant-hearted things to serve other people.

People just quietly going the extra mile for those who need something. Without a fuss or a fanfare, people going the extra mile in order to give time and money because someone is struggling.

As a church family, keep going. Keep going in that. Because look at verse 17. This is what invites God's blessing. Okay, so, what's going on?

First of all, Jesus is talking about the cross. He enacts its effect. He expresses its necessity. He explains its example, the example of service. One final detail that these verses highlight about the cross.

And that is, they emphasize its cause. They emphasize its cause. You see, when we ask the question of who is responsible for Good Friday, who is responsible for the cross, we could start with verse 2.

[23 : 11] Look at verse 2. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, we say, well, Satan is behind the betrayal that led to Jesus' death.

It's Satan. It's responsible. It's again in verse 27. He says it there. But then verse 2, it is also Judas who makes the choice to betray Jesus when he put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him.

So Judas actually does it. Verse 31, it was him who went out, verse 30 and 31, to get the job done. So who's responsible?

Is it Satan? Is it Judas? Yes. Satan is at work. Judas' greed is also at work. But the point that these verses are at pains to make again and again and again is that Jesus is in control of the whole situation.

Verse 1, have a look. Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of the world to the Father.

Verse 3, Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going back to God, he knew his time was up.

[24 : 23] He also knew who it was that was going to betray him. Verse 11, for he knew who was to betray him. That is why he said, not all of you are clean. Again, verse 18, I'm not speaking of all of you. I know whom I have chosen, but the Scripture will be fulfilled.

He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me. 21, in case we don't know, truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me. The disciples are confused when he says that.

One of us? And Peter gestures to John, the disciple that Jesus loved. He's over beside him. He goes, ask him to one of us. You can imagine that.

Who is it? And John says, who is it, Lord? Jesus explains, and then he tells Judas to get on with the job, and as soon as Judas leaves, Jesus tells them, verse 31, so we've got 30.

After receiving the morsel of bread, Judas immediately went out, and it was night. When he had gone out, Jesus said, now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

[25 : 28] Now is the time. The ball is in motion. The point is that Jesus is in total control throughout, ensuring that the Scripture is fulfilled, verse 18, and ensuring that the plan unfolds exactly as it should.

Jesus' death was unjust, and it was evil. It was the result of a corrupt regime and a greedy establishment, but it was not an accident of history.

And Jesus is not a victim of circumstances either. He was in complete control through every twist and turn. So we need to be clear. Jesus' life was given. It was not taken.

And why this matters as we come in to land this morning. Why this matters is because if the Lord Jesus was in control at that point in history, in the darkest 24 hours of His life, then you can trust that He is in control in the darkest hour of your life as well.

If He was working out His good and perfect plans for the blessing of the whole world in this situation, He can be trusted to be working out those same plans for your good in whatever trials, in whatever betrayal, in whatever suffering you're experiencing.

[26 : 47] So trust Him. Trust Him. And allow the lessons of this backstage meeting with Jesus that the cleansing of the cross that we all need leads to service of others and confidence that God is in charge even in the dark times.

Allow these lessons to get into your heart such that you can go into the world confident that the Lord is in charge, He is working things out, that He has forgiven your sins and that you belong to Him. Let's pray together.